

KRAKA award acceptance speech, Mathias Klitgård

It is with great joy and gratitude that I receive the KRAKA award for the year 2025. Thank you to those of you who have nominated my PhD thesis for the award, thank you to Else Høytrup, to Foreningen for Kønsforskning and KRAKA committee.

It is a great honour to receive this award from the gender studies community, who have been a key interlocutor throughout my time writing this PhD. Especially because to be very honest, writing and developing this thesis has been anything but straightforward. I will explain why in a second.

As you have just heard, my PhD thesis develops the field of 'queer materialism' as an attempt to read together the three traditions queer theory, new materialism and historical materialism. Put very briefly, I turn to queer theory for its analyses of sexuality, body, and desire; to new materialism for its analyses of human exceptionalism and its attention to non-human matter; and to historical materialism for its analyses of capitalist exploitation and dispossession. Queer materialism, as I develop it, is an analytical angle and a space of encounter between these traditions: a way of fostering dialogue around material relations as determining for the social world.

Historically, though, the relationships between the three research and activist communities that have driven these three traditions forward have not always been without conflict - to say the least. The disagreements have, of course, also been scholarly about the nature of material relations, gender, race, class, language and identity, among other issues. But often, too often, disagreements turn into attacks, misreadings, strawman arguments, ridicule and other rhetorical moves to discredit the entire tradition in question. I cannot count the number of conference papers and research articles I have read whose main purpose was to reject wholesale the other traditions on weak and ungenerous grounds. I have also encountered this skepticism in relation to my own project. At times, even bringing the vocabulary or concerns of one tradition into a room shaped by another was enough to produce apprehension, discomfort, or direct refusal.

And yet, we need all of these three traditions – as well as the many other traditions of the gender studies field – to understand the full complexity of the social world. We are currently living through times of what Adam Tooze calls 'polycrisis' where crises overlap and reinforce each other, and where the most marginalized bear the biggest burden. The current conjuncture is one of war and of genocide; of a re-emerging far right; of rising queer and transphobia; of attacks on academic freedom, especially on gender studies and studies of racism and Islamophobia; of retreating welfare states and ensuing crises of care; of increased economic polarization and the super-rich departing from the rest of us; and of an unfolding climate catastrophe and biodiversity crisis.

These crises feed into each other but are themselves also symptomatic of structural dynamics that extend beyond the individual crisis formation. Queer theory, new materialism and historical materialism equip us with the tools necessary to comprehend how these crises are material. The

polycrisis analysis is helpful only if we remember that crises do not simply appear randomly but express and respond to underlying material relations, that is, the entangled and contradiction-ridden logics of exploitation, dispossession, and dehumanization, and the devaluation of non-human nature.

Facing this complex nature of the materiality of the polycrisis conjuncture, I lacked a framework for reading together these traditions. I felt the need to explore the conditions of possibility for the materialist encounter, to explore what a focus on matter and materialist politics provides in terms of facilitating a cross-tradition dialogue where analyses integrate and inform each other.

And so I wondered: How to hold together traditions that are often kept apart or even set against each other? Which languages, modes of analysis, concepts, affects, objects, or movements may facilitate feminist encounters? On a personal level, how to sit with not knowing fully, trusting that work foreign to our own is needed even when not immediately understandable within our own framework?

The queer materialist project proceeds from the insistence that all three traditions offer invaluable critiques of the status quo, but also that none of them are complete on their own. In a world of entangled and complex problems, we need theories, networks and communities that can think across heteronormative, human exceptionalist, and capitalist oppression. Queer materialism proposes a common framework that allows us to appreciate work done in other critical traditions. It reads with generosity and a willingness to trust that work not immediately translatable into our own tradition may still expand the horizons of everybody involved.

I do this through a diffractive methodology. Following the work of Donna Haraway, Trinh Minh-ha, Karen Barad and others, I find in the diffractive methodology a systematic approach for co-reading texts or traditions that are not immediately related but whose insights can complement and strengthen each other. Just like waves enhance each other when they meet and overlap, traditions may be read diffractively through each other in order to update and clarify rather than dismiss and reject. For me, the diffractive methodology invites us to think constructively inside the convergences and tensions where traditions become co-articulated.

With the project of queer materialism, I hope to contribute to feminist efforts to theorize and activate material relations by suggesting a systematic account of the queer materialist field as a space of encounter. I hope that queer materialism may provide new pathways for feminist critique and creation of counter-stories that the present conjuncture calls for; that queer materialism may invite new conversations that center collaboration, entanglement, and cross-tradition dialogues for feminist knowledge production in a moment of overlapping, systemic crises.

Earlier I said that writing this PhD thesis has been anything but straightforward. Looking back, I realize that I have spent a great part of the time developing my PhD fighting for the standpoint that all three traditions offer key analyses for understanding the present, trying to carve out a space for an incipient queer materialism. Receiving the KRAKA award today matters deeply to

me – in every sense of the word - because it signals that the gender studies community, which I consider my home, recognizes this effort.

Thank you again to the KRAKA committee, but above all, thank you to the gender studies community, who make it all worth it. Thank you.